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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002455

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: JAMMU AND KASHMIR: CHIDAMBARAM PLEDGES MILITARY
PULLBACK IN PARLIAMENT

REF: A. NEW DELHI 2356

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 2355

[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 2208

[1](#)D. NEW DELHI 2155

[1](#)E. NEW DELHI 2135

Classified By: Political Counselor Uzra Zeya, Reasons 1.5 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a follow up to assurances by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the Home Minister P. Chidambaram in October (ref c-e), the Home Minister declared in Parliament on December 2 that the GOI would withdraw "significant" military and paramilitary forces from Jammu and Kashmir, but he did not provide any numbers. He also reiterated in Parliament the GOI's willingness to talk to separatists, adding that the GOI's offer has received a positive response. The fact that Chidambaram announced these moves in Parliament is important because it commits the GOI more firmly to the path of military pullback as well as to dialogue with the separatists. The drawdown in security forces is particularly significant because softening the security footprint is one of the most powerful confidence building measure that the GOI could take in its reconciliation efforts with the Kashmiri people. We expect any military pullback that takes place will be slow and measured, with the GOI ready to reverse it quickly if there are any signs of an increase in insurgent activity. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Home Minister P. Chidambaram announced in Parliament on December 2 that the GOI has been and would continue to withdraw "significant battalions" of military and paramilitary forces from Jammu and Kashmir. He noted that this was part of the GOI's ongoing effort to shift law and order responsibilities to the Jammu and Kashmir police. He refused to divulge the numbers of troops involved. He described the GOI decision as a response to the sharp reduction in the insurgency, with levels of violence declining this year to their lowest levels in many years. Chidambaram noted that hundreds of thousands of Hindus had participated without incident in the Amarnath pilgrimage in the valley. He observed that Muslim and Sikh religious celebrations had taken place in the valley with no disturbance. He conceded that reducing force levels is a

risky step because "our troubles in Jammu and Kashmir are not over" and infiltration continues at a brisk pace.

¶3. (U) Chidambaram also reiterated in Parliament the GOI's offer to talk with "every shade of political opinion" in Jammu and Kashmir, including the mainstream political parties, the constituents of the All Party Hurriyat Conference, and other groups. He reported that the responses to the GOI's offer are "encouraging" but did not go further to provide any details on discussions with the separatists. He insisted again that the Delhi-Srinagar talks would be "quiet." Chidambaram was criticized on the floor by an opposition member for sitting down with the separatists without demanding that they give up their demands of self-determination. (Note: The reaction of separatists and the GOI to the December 4 assassination attempt against one of the separatist leaders will be reported septel.)

¶4. (U) Media reported on December 6-7 that the 39th Mountain Division had completed its redeployment from Rajouri and Poonch to its 9th Corps cantonment base in the adjoining state of Himachal Pradesh. The division, consisting of about 15,000 soldiers, had been deployed for counterinsurgency duties in Jammu and Kashmir since 1994. There have been other smaller but well publicized pull-backs of paramilitary forces in the last 3 months.

¶5. (SBU) Jammu-based Arun Joshi of the Hindustan Times was skeptical that the withdrawal of security forces was real or significant, calling it GOI "chicanery." He told Poloff

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that the security forces had been beefed up for the state assembly election last year, the parliamentary election in April-May and the Amarnath pilgrimage in June-July. With these security-sensitive events behind it, the GOI is pulling back the additional forces it had sent to the state. Joshi noted that some paramilitary forces had been withdrawn from the Jammu area but had been replaced by units of the Punjab Police, which is equally alien to the Jammu and Kashmir milieu. He noted that the relocation of the 39th Mountain Division had been going on for three months and had been periodically milked by the GOI in the media to give the impression that it is withdrawing more forces than it actually is.

¶6. (SBU) Jawaharlal Nehru University professor Amitabh Matoo believes the security force pullback is not cosmetic. He told Poloff that the relocation of security forces is a slow but serious effort by the GOI to put the JK Police in charge of the law and order responsibility in the larger urban areas of the state. Unless there is a surge in violence, the GOI will continue to steadily pull back the paramilitary and military presence, Matoo added. He warned, however, that the JK police is short-staffed, ill-equipped and burdened with non-core duties such as protecting VIPs.

¶7. (C) Comment: Although Chidambaram (and the Prime Minister) have earlier publicly said that the GOI would reduce its security force presence in the state and will talk to separatists, the fact that Chidambaram announced it in Parliament bestows a certain gravitas and sanctity to this effort. Cabinet members weigh carefully what they say in Parliament because it is hard to disown or backtrack from such pronouncements. Chidambaram's words in Parliament commit the GOI more firmly down the path of military pullback as well as to dialogue with the separatists. The reduction in security forces is especially significant because there is agreement among our interlocutors that softening the security footprint is the most powerful confidence building measure that the GOI could take in its reconciliation efforts with the Kashmiri people. Embassy expects any military pullback that takes place will be slow and measured, with the GOI ready to reverse it quickly if there are any signs of an increase in

insurgent activity.

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